

THE
Succession of Martyrs.

A SERMON

PREACHED BEFORE THE
CENTRAL BAPTIST ASSOCIATION OF NOVA SCOTIA,
AT ITS NINTH ANNUAL SESSION,
HELD WITH THE CHURCH IN GRANVILLE STREET,
HALIFAX, JUNE 20, 1859.

By J. M. CRAMP, D. D.

"And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow-servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled."—Rev. vi. 11.

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THE SUCCESSION OF MARTYRS

A SERMON.

It is sometimes desirable, on such annual occasions as the present, to call the attention of the assembled brethren to facts and principles identified with our denominational peculiarities. They are regarded by us as important, and they ought to be held in constant remembrance.

For this reason the passage now read, has been selected for our consideration. It relates to the opening of the fifth seal. The Apostle saw in vision under the altar "the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held?" They are represented as wondering at the delay of divine vengeance. It seems to them that a crime so heinous as the slaughter of pious men on account of their piety should meet with prompt and condign punishment. They knew not how to reconcile the forbearance of God with his justice, and they exclaim, under the influence of deep emotion, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" In reply, they are bidden to be patient: many more will be put to death for the faith. There will be a Succession of martyrs for ages to come. "The time appointed is long." Individual cases of retribution will occur, but the full and final punishment of persecutors is to be reserved till "the time of the end," and that is far distant. When the number of their suffering "fellow-servants and brethren" shall be "fulfilled," God will "plead his own cause," and raise his church to a state of endless peace and glory.

We proceed to observe, that there has been a succession of martyrs in the christian church ; that in that succession those who professed Baptist principles hold a distinguished place ; and that these facts are instructive, consoling, and admonitory.

I. THERE HAS BEEN A SUCCESSION OF MARTYRS IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

The Saviour foretold the persecution of his followers. "They shall deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you ; and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake," Mat. xxiv. 9. "Whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service," John xvi. 2. The apostolic history presents a continuous fulfilment of the prediction. The preachers preached at the risk of liberty or life : and profession of Christianity in those days might cost a man his all. The disciples were warned that "through much tribulation they must enter the kingdom." They learned by painful experience that "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution," 2 Tim. iii. 12.

So it continued for nearly three centuries. On the one hand, governments claimed the right to prescribe modes of worship, and to punish neglect of established forms, accounting disobedience as a crime equal to sedition. On the other, christian men pleaded a higher law, to which all must bow, and which, in case of clashing of authorities, must ever be supreme. "We ought to obey God," they said, "rather than men," Acts. v. 29. Hence arose a perpetual conflict. Earthly rulers demanded soul-submission ; but the servants of Christ held that

"Consciences and souls were made
To be the Lord's alone."

The horrors of those times cannot be described. Paganism put forth all its strength to crush the new religion. Magistrates and mobs withstood the missionaries ; now, the aid of the law was invoked—anon, popular vengeance was suffered to run riot without restraint. To whet the appetite for slaughter, Christians were charged with the perpetration of the most atrocious deeds, and denounced as unfit to live in civilised

society. When calamities befel the empire, such as famine, floods, or pestilence, all was placed to *their* account, and the wrath of the gods was to be assuaged by their destruction. Imperial despots sought to ingratiate themselves in public favour by the wholesale massacre of the Christians. Their blood drenched the soil of the amphitheatre. Their flaming bodies lighted up Nero's gardens. In the Decian persecution, in the middle of the third century,—and in the Diocletian, at the beginning of the fourth, cruelties before unheard of were inflicted.* But the church survived them all. God's army flinched not from the fight. As fast as the ranks were thinned they were filled up again. The arm of the persecutor was wearied, but the faith of the sufferers did not fail. Victims followed victims, in long succession, glorying in the pangs of martyrdom. The holy family could not become extinct. "The word of God grew and multiplied."

And now another scene opens to the view. Though Constantine the Great did not personally profess Christianity till the last year of his life, he favoured and patronised it. Succeeding emperors followed his example. The Christian religion was enjoined by law and supported by the State.

*They are thus described :—"The most excessive barbarities were made use of upon all who would not blaspheme Christ and offer incense to the imperial gods. They were publicly whipped—drawn by the heels through the streets of cities—racked till every bone of their body was disjoined,—had their teeth beat out,—their noses, hands, and ears cut off,—sharp pointed spears run under their nails,—were tortured with melted lead thrown on their naked bodies, had their eyes dug out,—their limbs cut off, were condemned to the mines—ground between stones,—stoned to death,—burnt alive,—thrown headlong from high buildings,—beheaded,—smothered in burning limekilns.—run through the body with sharp spears,—destroyed with hunger, thirst, and cold,—thrown to the wild beasts,—broiled on gridirons with slow fires,—cast by heaps into the sea,—crucified, scraped to death with sharp shells,—torn to pieces by the boughs of trees, and, in a word, destroyed by all the various methods that the most diabolical subtlety and malice could devise."—Dr. Chandler's *History of Persecution*, p. 51.

Then a strange revolution took place. Power changed hands, and the professed servants of Jesus learned to persecute. Refusal to worship idols had been a capital offence under Paganism; that worship itself was punishable by death under Christian rule. Still stranger events ensued. Brother hated brother, if difference of opinion separated them, and manifested the hatred by anathema and proscription. Government was called on to sanction nought but orthodoxy, of which the ruler for the time being assumed to be the judge, and he naturally declared in favour of the system or speculation to which he had attached himself. So it happened that Trinitarians and Arians were orthodox by turns: under Constantine the Arians were banished—the Trinitarians, under his son Constantius. Many a bishop lived in an episcopal palace one year, and occupied the exile's hovel, or laboured far down in the mines the next. The few Pagans that were left laughed at the folly; angels, if they could, would have wept over it.

At length one form overshadowed the rest. Antichrist sat enthroned at Rome, and gave laws to kings. For a long time the Church lorded it over the State, and mighty monarchs did her bidding, shuddering in coward fear at her curses. Yet there rose up brave spirits, all through the middle ages, manfully contending for truth, freedom, and right. They protested against the will-worship of the times; they appealed to the Bible; they would not bow down to images, nor pray to saints, nor defile themselves with the superstitions which had supplanted godliness; and they said, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye." How were they treated? Let ancient records tell. Their narratives are fearfully graphic. The tales of martyrdom are frightful beyond measure. Paganism was far outdone by Popery, both in regard to the number of victims and the varieties of torture. One illustration may suffice. In the crusades against the Albigenses, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, ecclesiastics directed the operations of the invading

armies, and stimulated the fury of the soldiers; as fortress after fortress fell, and towns and cities were successively stormed, torrents of blood were shed; indiscriminate slaughter was the order of the day; and the chronicler, a hard-hearted monk, boasts that they spared "neither rank, sex, nor age," but slew all without mercy, and that when, on one occasion, some hundreds were cast into the flames, they were "burned alive *with great joy*." It has been computed that *one million* lives were sacrificed in these crusades. Who can wonder that the souls under the altar exclaim, "How long, O Lord?"

"Time would fail" to tell of the doings of that most atrocious of all tribunals, the Inquisition. If Popery has been not inaptly styled "the master-piece of Satan," the Inquisition may be as appropriately called "the master-piece of Popery." It is regarded with intense abhorrence, not only by Protestants but also by Christian-minded Roman Catholics; only they are obliged, if resident in Popish countries, to speak of it "with bated breath," lest they fall under the power of its terrible fangs. The numbers that have perished, by public execution or private murder, will not be known till God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing."

It was a busy time with inquisitors, and their coadjutors and agents in the sixteenth century, when the people rose up in revolt against the Pope throughout a large part of Europe, demanding freedom of thought and worship. They were answered by angry bulls and brutal policy. The prisons were crowded; the martyr-fires blazed; the headsman's axe was ever in requisition; "blood, blood!" was the cry wherever papal influence prevailed.

Protestants were slow to unlearn the lesson taught them by Rome. They feared to cast away carnal weapons. They, too, must have fines, and prisons, and scaffolds, and implements of death. Lutheranism was established by law. Calvinism was established by law. Episcopacy was defended by pains and penalties, in England; Presbyterianism, in Scotland. Even

in this enlightened nineteenth century the mania for persecution shows itself. In some ecclesiastical constitutions it is evidently hereditary. Popish Spain expels Protestants. Protestant Sweden expels Papists.

II. Having established the fact, that there has been a succession of martyrs in the Christian church, it is proposed to show that IN THAT SUCCESSION THOSE WHO PROFESSED BAPTIST PRINCIPLES HOLD A DISTINGUISHED PLACE.

The first martyrs, you are fully aware, were all Baptists; for infant baptism was not known till the middle of the third century, and was not generally practised for a long time afterwards.

Among the witnesses for the truth who suffered during the dark ages those who rejected infant baptism were generally doomed to the severest inflictions. All classes rose up against them. Priests and people were equally enraged. Peter of Bruys and his followers, in the twelfth century—the Albigenes—the Waldenses—and other sects, bearing different names, but agreeing in their testimony against prevailing superstitions, were subjected to all manner of outrage. Innumerable murders were committed in the name of religion. The blood of the saints was poured out like water.

Systematic opposition to the truth, carried on unremittingly for centuries, had well nigh accomplished its object. The separatists from Rome were crushed, or driven for a time into concealment. Emboldened by the rise of the Reformers, our Baptist forefathers left their hiding places, claimed kindred with the protesting parties, and invited them to a fuller development of their principles. But their advances were scornfully rejected. The Reformers refused alliance with them, and strove to put them down. Papists regarded them as the offscouring of the Reformation, and poured upon them double vengeance. They were threatened with extermination on all sides. The storm burst on them with unmitigated fury.

The death-work began in Switzerland. "*Qui iterum mergit, mergatur*," said Zuingle—"let him who re-dips [it was

all dipping them—sprinkling was not in use] *be drowned.*" And drowned they were, "without mercy," as the edict threatened they should be. Felix Mantz, a learned and godly preacher of the gospel, leading the van of the martyr-host. Germany followed the example of Switzerland, emulating her savageness. The persecution reached the height of demoniacal brutality in the Netherlands.

The number of Baptist martyrs in the sixteenth century has not been reckoned. In some places they were swept away in masses. Six hundred were put to death in one town in Alsace. Historians tell with horror of *two hundred and eighty-eight* Protestant sufferers in England during the reign of Queen Mary—and truly it was horrible,—but they keep out of sight the still more startling fact that *ten times* that number of Baptists sealed the truth with their blood in different parts of Europe.

The sufferers were of all classes—the rich and the poor—the learned and the illiterate—aged men and women—fathers and mothers—young men and maidens—pastors, preachers, deacons, members, and hearers; any, the slightest connection with a Baptist Church, was deemed sufficient ground for the sentence of death.

All kinds of cruelties were inflicted on them. They were cast into filthy, under-ground dungeons, with nothing but the bare ground to lie on, and nothing to cover them. They were tortured to the utmost extremity of endurance. The manner of death varied. Some were drowned; some were beheaded; some were strangled; some were roasted alive; some were burnt. In many instances, their heads were stuck on poles, and their bodies left to rot on the gallows. Sometimes they were led to public death; on other occasions the sentence was executed in prison and in the silence of the night, lest the people should express sympathy for the martyr.

We may not undertake to defend every position these good men assumed, or to justify every measure they adopted. But it is undeniably evident that they suffered for spiritual religion.

They dared their persecutors to convict them of any crime. Whatever else was purposely mingled with the process, in order to justify or excuse the condemnation, it was really for the rejection of infant baptism, or for being baptized on profession of faith, or for administering such baptism, that they suffered.

In England, men who were themselves afterwards martyrs to Protestantism united in persecuting Baptists, even unto death. Cranmer, Ridley, and Latimer were guilty in this matter. Even good old John Fox, the martyrologist, when petitioning Queen Elizabeth, in behalf of condemned Baptists, did not ask that they might be set free, but only that the mode of punishment might be changed—that they might not be committed to the flames.

We pass on to the seventeenth century. It was a time of perplexity, contempt, and oppression. The Stuarts were bent on establishing despotism, and, as a means to that end, on extirpating religious dissent. Nor were they the only foes to freedom. During the ascendancy of the Presbyterians in the Long Parliament an act was passed, decreeing the punishment of death to Athiests, Deists, Arians, and Socinians, and of imprisonment till they should renounce their alleged errors (which was tantamount to imprisonment for life) to the deniers of infant baptism. Then came the restoration of Charles II. which involved all the dissidents in one common trouble. Baptists shared with their brethren of other denominations in the distresses of that period. They were cruelly plundered. Many of their best men lived long in prison: some died there. Bunyan spent twelve years in Bedford jail. Henry Forty the same time at Exeter. Francis Bampfield, Vavasor Powell, "the apostle of Wales," and Thomas Delanne, author of the "Plea for Nonconformity," an unanswerable production, died in prison. And here, on this continent, our predecessors "had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment," inflicted by men who had left their native

land in search of "freedom to worship God," and then refused to others the rights which they claimed for themselves.

This nineteenth century is comparatively free from the stain, but not wholly so. Our beloved brother Oncken and his associates have endured great vexation and annoyance in the prosecution of their labours in Germany ; and to this day some of the petty governments of that country throw every obstacle in the way of Baptist effort. Our ministers are fined and imprisoned—our religious assemblies broken up—and the children of our brethren snatched from their parents and taken to the clergy to be sprinkled. Lutherans persecute us in Denmark and Sweden ; and Spanish Jesuits, authorised by their government, have suppressed our mission on the Island of Fernando Po.

But we have not imitated the policy of our enemies. Genuine Baptists cannot persecute. We point to Rhode Island and Roger Williams, and maintain, with that great man, "that the government of the civil magistrate extendeth no further than over the bodies and goods of the subject, and therefore hath no civil power over the soul." We cannot consent to the enforcement of any creed or mode of worship ; nor to the endowment or preference of any sect ; nor to the imposition of religious tests. We protest against proscription—against pandering to party—against ascendancy ;—whether it be Papal—Protestant—Episcopalian — or Presbyterian ascendancy. We demand equal justice for all, and equal right to privileges, honours, and offices. We plead for putting "the right man in the right place," on the ground of fitness only, irrespective of religious profession—as in India, at the present time, Hindoos, Mussulmans, and Parsees are on the same footing as Christians. And much as we love the Bible, and heartily as we desire that the youth of our land may be thoroughly instructed in it, we ask for no legislative enactment. It is altogether contrary to Baptist principles to enjoin the use of the Bible by human law, or to make it compulsory by penalty, direct or indirect. We

fear the entering wedge of the state-church system, knowing that system to be inconsistent with scripture and hostile to freedom and piety.

III. The facts which have been now adduced are instructive, consoling, and admonitory.

1. They are *instructive*.

The history of martyrdom affords striking illustration of the teachings of scripture respecting human depravity. It is the most melancholy chapter in the annals of our race. We are prepared to hear of the ravages of war; the passion for mutual destruction has raged in all lands, from time immemorial. But who could have expected that professing christians would vex and murder one another on account of religious differences—or that for shades of opinion and varieties of worship men would be despoiled of their freedom? Surely this is a mournful commentary on the inspired announcement. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.”

Again; we learn the folly and iniquity of the state-church system. Uniformity is the aim; compulsion, the means; defeat and disgrace the result. The system cannot be sustained without the adoption of measures which are at variance with the spirit of Christianity. Free thought is crushed by the iron hand of power. God’s people are deprived of their liberties. A nation of formalists may be trained by this system, but spiritual religion withers under it.

Once more: We are reminded of the necessity of adherence to the laws of Christ. The history of martyrdom is a continual protest against deviation from them. Those witnesses for the truth died in defence of the original faith and practice. But to what lengths of departure men had gone before they could venture on deeds of persecution! It might seem a small thing to superadd a significant ceremony to the simple ritual of the gospel; but when men had begun to invent and improve, (as they vainly imagined), love of pomp and power urged them on, and so one abuse led to another till the aspect of outward

Christianity was altogether changed. Then opposition excited violence. The word of God was supplanted by human creeds, and, as Robert Robinson quaintly but truly remarked, "the last article of the creed was the establishment of the Inquisition." If men had been content to abide by the New Testament we should never have heard of baptismal regeneration,—of civil establishments of Christianity,—of the gradations of church hierarchies,—or of the multiform superstitions which have been palmed on the world as developments of the gospel. *Developments?* Why, it is already developed. The system came from the Lord, by the hands of his Apostles, and is embodied in the Book, in a complete and perfect state:—woe be to him who undertakes to improve the work of God! Alteration or addition cannot be admitted without concessions which involve the principles and the spirit of Popery. In fact, as *we* believe, there is no just medium between that system and ours; for when power to change or add is assumed, a principle is conceded which leads straight to Rome.

2. These facts are *consoling*.

See the cause of Christ, surviving all pressure, rising above all opposition. The bush burns with fire, but it is not consumed. "What shall I do," said the Burggraf of Alzey. Some he had beheaded—some he had drowned—others he had branded or maimed. "What shall I do? *The more I condemn, the more they increase.*" How is this? The Lord himself explains it. "Upon this rock will I build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it," Mat. xvi. 18.

See the grace and faithfulness of the Saviour, in supporting his persecuted servants. The narratives of the sufferers are sometimes tedious—their letters are long,—and their modes of expression may seem quaint, uncouth or strange;—but it is manifest that the Lord was with them, fulfilling his ancient promises, and sustaining them when "heart and flesh failed? Then—they calmly bade farewell to beloved ones who met them on the way to the scaffold or the stake, and endured with un-

flinching firmness the most excruciating tortures. "You have struck me with roses," exclaimed Obadiah Holmes, as he was unloosed from the whipping-post, where we had received thirty strokes "with a three-corded whip, the man striking with all his strength." "Having joyfulness in my heart and cheerfulness in my countenance, as the spectators observed, I said to the magistrates, 'You have struck me with roses.' The Lord "made it easy" to him. "This side is sufficiently roasted," said Leonard Baernkoff, who was burned at Salzburg in 1542; "turn me round, for by the grace of God this suffering is light and unimportant in comparison to eternal glory." The grace of Christ was "sufficient" for them; his strength was "made perfect in weakness."

See the honour that has been put upon us! "Unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him but also to suffer for his sake," Phil. i. 20. We have been the butt of anti-christian malice from the beginning. It is a badge of distinction; may we always be found worthy to wear it!

3. These facts are *admonitory*.

The admonition relates to fidelity—watchfulness—union—and perseverance.

Fidelity. We spring from a martyr stock. Our principles must be firmly and faithfully maintained. Those who have gone before us "suffered the loss of all things" for them, and great numbers "loved not their lives unto the death." Let us take heed lest our distinguishing tenets be in any degree neglected, or their importance overlooked. Believing as we do that they comprise vital truths, which cannot be disregarded without immense injury to the cause of the Redeemer, let us place them in the fore-front, and "teach them diligently to our children," and be especially careful that the members of our churches be well indoctrinated. It is peculiarly desirable that they should clearly understand the spiritual nature of the kingdom of Christ. This is the key to the most important controversies of the times; if they are sound here, they are

prepared for any encounter with the adversaries of truth. And there is the more need of watchful care at the present crisis, since it is manifest, however the thing may be disguised, that a crusade against the Baptists has commenced in this Province. Stand to your arms, brethren! and prepare for the conflict. "Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above, all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, watching thereunto with all perseverance," Ephes. vi. 14-18. Your distinctive principles are identified with the existence and prosperity of Christ's church. Scatter them abroad in every direction,—by the pulpit—by the press—by the bible class—by the Sunday School. It is not bigotry; it is not sectarianism; it is "fighting the good fight of faith;" it is the exercise of allegiance to the "King of Kings."

Watchfulness. We profess great regard for purity. We hold that none are qualified for membership in the church of Christ who have not been "born again," and that the maintenance of godly discipline is essential to safety and success. How needful that there should be a strict correspondence between our principles and our practice,—that the greatest care should be exercised in the admission of members,—and that all moral delinquency should be dealt with promptly and impartially! In some religious communities, laxity is unavoidable, and the pious mourn hopefully over it;—in Baptist churches it is suicide—it is ruin.

Union. Our enemies know our power, and that their best policy is to divide us. This is their cherished purpose. If they can set us against one another and induce us to spend our strength in bickering and strife, their object will be gained. This diversion of our energies will be well-pleasing to them.

As long as they can keep us engaged in "biting and devouring one another," or withdraw our attention, by any means, from our mission as Baptists, their wishes are accomplished. Errors can then creep on undisturbed, and effect secure lodgment in our neighbourhoods. Let us be warned in time. Let us disappoint our foes. What though we differ from one another on some points affecting our political or social interests? Such differences will ever exist in a free country, and among free men; but Baptists ought to be the last to regard them as grounds of disunion, or to allow them to interfere with the claims of the good cause. We are bound to manifest mutual forbearance, and while granting to each other the utmost latitude of thought and action in reference to the affairs of this world, to rally round the standard of truth and righteousness, and press on, shoulder to shoulder, against the common foe.

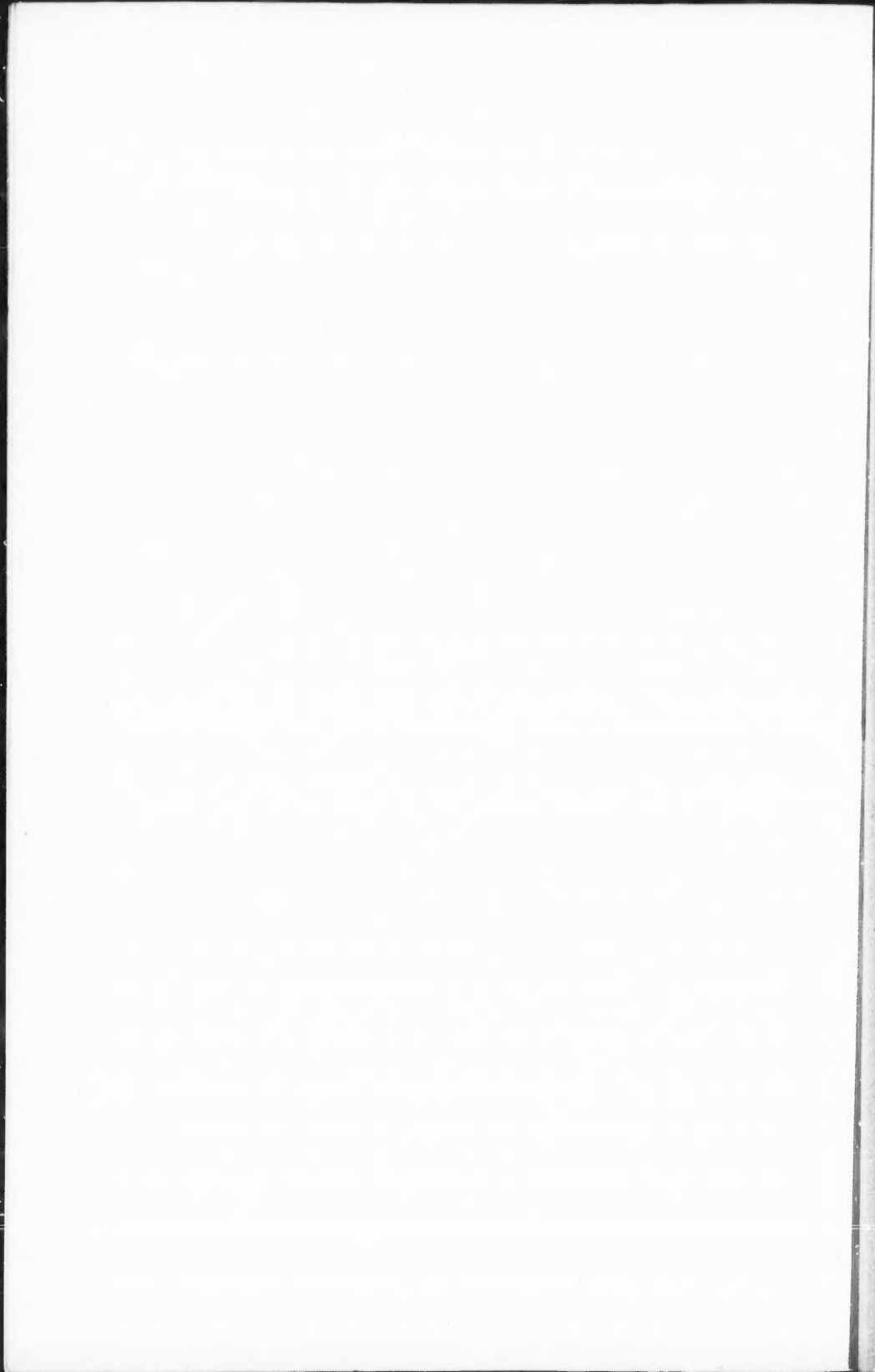
Perseverance. Much is yet to be done; a great work is before us. Many districts in this Province are still destitute of evangelical instruction. Our missions, Home (including also the French and Gaelic missions,) and Foreign, demand liberal support. Our educational enterprises require to be carried on with increasing vigour. If we determine to be true to our acknowledged principles, the blessing of God will be still more largely enjoyed, and the encouraging progress we have made during the last year will be perpetuated.

We rejoice in the success of all christian labourers, for we love all who "love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." But we hold that primitive Christianity is fully developed in Baptist views and practice only, and therefore we adhere to them, and seek to spread them over the land. We are inspired with the hope expressed in Krummachers' words—"There is a future for the Baptists." We adopt the language of the martyr Balthazar Hubmeyer, (burned at Vienna in 1528—his wife was put to death by drowning) "I believe and know that Christendom shall not receive its rising aright, unless baptism and the Lord's Supper are brought to their original purity."

With these convictions, we feel bound to labour with all our might for denominational advancement. The world is to be regenerated ; but that result, can only be brought about by God's blessing on the dissemination of New Testament truth and the establishment of New Testament policy. Let us give ourselves to the diffusion of truth ;—let us live according to the truth ;—and let us seek the Lord in earnest prayer for the continual outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Truth and prayer will conquer the world.

“ Be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises,” Heb. vi. 12. “ The noble army of martyrs”—says the grand old hymn—“ praise thee.” Oh what a glorious meeting there will be when the “ fellow-servants and brethren” of those who are now “ under the altar” shall be fulfilled !—“ What are these which are arrayed in white robes ? and whence came they ? * * These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple ; and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more ; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters ; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes,” Rev. vii. 13-17. May we form part of that blessed company !





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